

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Security Administration  
Parry Avenue at Commerce  
Dallas 1, Texas

July 16, 1946

To: Mr. R. W. Hollenberg, Regional Director  
San Francisco, California

From: John H. Williams, Senior Administrative Assistant  
Dallas, Texas

Subject: Study of the Problems of Integrating Negro Migrants into  
California Agriculture

In making a study of the prospects and problems of integrating Negro migrants into agriculture in the state of California, it was necessary to make the following observations as a basis for the study:

1. What types of farming were formerly employed by Negro farm operators in the group, as compared with farming practices of the area of their present location.
2. What are the requirements for becoming established in farming in this area.
3. How available is land for farming.
4. What opportunities are offered for training and education, which would adapt suitable Negro migrants to farming practices in this area, and which their previous experience has not equipped them for.
5. What are the opportunities for employment in farm labor.

Little or no effort was made to form a general opinion about the situation prior to the time field studies and interviews were made. An attempt was made to have people in various walks of life give their on-the-ground opinion, and the summary will give a resume of these opinions. Because of the time limitation, it was necessary to stick fairly close to the study of material that would contribute directly to the solution of the problems of integrating Negro migrants into California agriculture.

Prior to my leaving for the field, conferences were had with Mr. Ed. Banfield, Information Specialist, and Mr. Ralph Hollenberg, Regional Director. During the conference with Mr. Banfield, both farm labor and family-size farm opportunities in the Region were discussed. He gave me a rather good picture of the situation and suggested possible avenues of information, which could be utilized in the time I had to work.

It was agreed that I would work my way to the Los Angeles area, through the San Joaquin Valley, working with Farm Security staffs at Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield and Hanford; and with Mr. Clyde C. Christensen, FSA State Director, on the balance of the survey. When the question of travel arose, it was suggested that it would be best to use a government car for the field trips, as Mr. Banfield felt it would be more

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advantageous for me to talk with many of the families alone, to which proposal Mr. Hollenberg agreed. The conference with Mr. Hollenberg gave me a birdseye view of the situation, and how we could arrange the study. The plans Mr. Banfield and I had worked out were discussed with the Regional Director and he approved them heartily. It was also agreed that I should start work at Merced on June 3, and conclude with a conference with the Director June 20, 1946.

The following areas were visited during the two weeks' trip from June 3 through June 17:

San Joaquin Valley - Merced, Madera, Fresno, Hanford, Bakersfield,  
Button Willow

Palo Verde Valley - Blythe

Imperial Valley - El Centro

Cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles

According to the best estimates more than 200,000 Negro families have migrated to California in the last five (5) years. Practically all of these families came from Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, and, although the larger proportion of them migrated from the rural South, not more than fifty percent of them are farmers. In the population movement, the people in the urban centers migrated first and rural families moved in to take their places, subsequently, an approximate 100,000 of these families have an agricultural background. From all indications, they do not plan to leave the Pacific Coast area. It was not their intention, however, at the outset, to remain here, but on returning home and having a chance to compare conditions, they chose to return to the Pacific Coast.

No doubt, the background of the average rural migrant, that of simple row cropping of cotton and corn, at first glance tends to lead one to believe that he is not qualified to take up the more complex agricultural operations common to this area--such as "irrigation" for instance. However, reliable sources of information indicate: we have numerous examples of families who have become adept in this farming system. Reference is made, in the body of this report, to as many of these farmers as it was possible to visit in the limited time. That, there are successful ones in the group is without question, and for the most part their background was the same as that of the migrant group currently studied; the main difference between the present migrants and those who came prior to the war is: the first group came to participate in agriculture and the present migrants came for industrial work.

However, there is a definite drift of former industrial workers toward the rural areas, as shown in this report. Opportunities for training and educating Negroes to compete in the type of agriculture practiced in the area are limited. The only practical way for them to get the training needed is by working as farm laborers. As a farm laborer, the migrant will have the opportunity to work with and, in time, gain an understanding of all the new farm technics. If, however, this could be coupled with some in-service training, it would enable the family to make more rapid progress.

#### SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

Leaving San Francisco on the morning of June 3rd, I arrived at Merced at 12:35 pm, where I met the County FSA Supervisor and HM Supervisor. The HM Supervisor, Mrs. Simpson, and I visited C. Smith, Rt. 236, Winton, California; Dan Smith, Atwater; Isiah Cains, Merced; and other points in the County.



Gaines stated that FSA had saved him, and he believed that if more Negroes had this help they could succeed in this county. The Smith Brothers both stated that what a family needed was credit, that did not take all they made. They are doing fairly well and believe that any sensible Negro could do as well, perhaps better, if he had the chance. These families seem to think that FSA loans are available to just a few each year and expressed the belief that not many people knew about the loans.

Mr. Eugene Shirley, FSA Supervisor of Merced County, said that it is very difficult to make the type of loan needed in the county with \$2,500. He stated that landlords are constantly increasing rent, making it more difficult to rent land each year, and that it was also growing more difficult to buy a good farm. However, there is considerable acreage that can be bought, but it will have to be levelled; also, water is cheap. His viewpoint is optimistic for the FO program in the County.

On June 4th, visits were made alone to Calvin Hicks, John Harvey, Pape Wise, Elbert Roquemore, Jack Staten and James Winton in Merced County. Harvey, Hicks and Wise are on the FSA program. Harvey and Wise are getting along fairly well. Hicks' case required more study than I had time to give it, but he seemed to be just making out.

Roquemore and Staten knew nothing of Farm Security and stated that, if they could get the type of help the FSA program offered, they would have been in the clear long ago. They had borrowed money from the Gin Association on their cotton crop. Both had good farms of 38 and 60 acres, respectively. Staten definitely believes that Negroes can succeed in farming in the area and will make better farm laborers than Mexicans, as soon as they learn the <sup>farming</sup> system of the country.

James Jones of Winton is growing a crop of sweet potatoes and has 20 acres in fine shape. He also works as a labor contractor some seasons. He says that, if Negroes knew about FSA, and could get help, they could either rent or purchase all the land they wanted in the county. He said that the labor supply in the county was short primarily because farm workers had no place to live. He further stated that Negro farm laborers are learning the business and Negro hoe hands are in big demand. He gave me the names of ten farmers in Madera County, and one of the oldest labor contractors in the county.

More than 250 Negro families have moved into the Merced area in the past three years, and have started several new additions west of the town. In talking with some of these families, I learned that they were all farm families, either from Texas or Oklahoma. Ten years ago there were less than 40 families (Negro) in this area. Johnny Jones, a member of one of these families, said that he had lived for over two years in Merced, coming from Frisco where he had worked in the shipyards. Frisco was too damp, so he moved here. He says he had saved his money, paid for his house and believes that in another year or so he will be in shape to start farming in the area. Many of these families, according to Jones, have learned how crops and livestock are handled, and plan to start farming as soon as they are able. He knew about FSA, but expressed his doubts that many others knew about it. He doubted getting any help from Farm Security Administration.

#### Madera

Reached Madera about 1:20 the afternoon of June 4th and stopped at a garage to inquire for Willie McAllister, labor contractor, and found that I was talking to him. I told McAllister what I wanted and he agreed to go with me while his truck was



undergoing repairs. McAllister had been contracting labor for fifteen years. He stated that Negroes are learning fast - faster than Mexican labor he used to handle. He says the quality of labor he is handling is growing better. Two years ago he could only depend on one-third for the next day's work; now, he can count on three out of four. This three-fourths is able to work without supervision and they, in turn, take an interest in teaching the new-comer. He thinks the most of them are saving their money especially to build a home. Some few plan to farm as soon as they are able. He estimates that prior to the war there were not more than 100 Negro families in the area. Now he thinks there are between 600 and 800, and expressed his belief that there would be more if there was any place for them to live. He inquired of me concerning government help in developing a housing project or small farms for part-time farming.

During the afternoon, McAllister and I visited the following Negro farms:

- Clarese McAllister - 20 acres, owns 15 cows
- George Pulling - 10 acres
- Lee Jones - 10 acres
- Jesse Johnson, 20 acres
- Monroe Ward - 20 acres - Southern edge of Merced County
- C. A. Tubbs - 40 acres - owns tractor, 7 acres ladino pasture, 400 hens, milch cows 17
- George Tearls - 80 acres, milks 30 cows
- John Carter - 80 acres, 20 milch cows
- J. H. Brown - 17 acres, has big truck
- Abe Howard - 40 acres, 10 milch cows
- Elsie McAllister - 80 acres unimproved land
- Will Lewis - 40 acres
- Mrs. M. Shamons - 70 acres, 15 cows
- Ben Omev - 20 acres, 5 cows
- Sharper Turner - 80 acres
- Mrs. Turner (Shaper's mother) - 40 acres
- Lee Turner - rents 60 acres.

I was told there were others in the area. We returned to town and met G. W. Sims, merchant and labor contractor, who was concerned about (1) Mexican nationals replacing domestic labor, (2) getting government help in housing, and (3) getting information and assistance to farmers. None of the farmers visited knew about FSA.

Up to this time, I noted a surprisingly large number of small Negro owners and operators in the area. Most of them were badly in need of financial assistance. Farmer C. A. Tubbs, whom I talked with, said that, if these people had some help, they could do well. He stated further that they needed money and advice.

The Madera-Merced area has a fairly well-balanced agriculture - cotton, sweet potatoes, alfalfa, grapes and dairy cattle. Most of the Negroes I met and talked with either needed more dairy cattle or better dairy cattle.

I was informed by Professor L. C. Thompson, white high-school principal of Madera, that the main problem presented by the influx of Negroes into the schools was one of qualification. He said that the Negro children were fairly well-behaved, and would be for the most part good children, were it not for a few who would agitate. At the present time, however, he stated, things were running smoothly. "We have had to give the new Negro children special assistance," he said, "as we did not want to give them additional handicaps by setting them back a grade or two." He added, "The average of this group was a grade and a half behind those who had been in attendance over a longer period of time." He was optimistic though, and said he thought the



school could absorb them now, as fast as they came. He further stated that they have the ability to learn, but came from poor schools. And, their being able to adjust themselves has much to do with the solution of this problem.

W. J. Jacobson, farm placement manager, of Madera, with whom I talked, stated that the key to the problem of integrating Negroes into agriculture was one of housing. He expressed a belief that if some relief can be had in the housing situation, that a better type of family would move into the area for farm labor work, and from these could be drawn an adequate supply of farm labor. He felt that they would be able to graduate into operators and ranch owners. There is still available land, and, although the values are climbing, he believes farms can still be bought at reasonable prices.

### Fresno

At Fresno, on June 5th, I talked with Paul Jackson, FSA Supervisor, and together we visited the families of:

Frank Jones, Rt. 5

Lee Linton, Carruthers

Johnny B. Jones, Carruthers

Talking with Frank Jones, I learned that he had been in California 12 years, all of which time was spent in the Fresno area. He had bought a 40 acre farm in 1940 that he was operating, and has his debt in good shape. According to him, if he had not had serious illness in his family for the past few years, he would have had his farm paid for. He expressed his belief that it was not as difficult to farm in this area as it was in the South. "There are some things you will have to learn to do that are different, however, once you learn them, you have the situation well in hand," Jones said. He continued, "You don't have to try to figure the weather, which you can't. You know it won't rain, and you know you will use ditch water till it plays out, after which you start your pump. It is certainly not as uncertain as what I had to contend with before I came here. Of course, a fellow has to work more days, and sometimes on Sundays, but it sure pays off. If a fellow has good sense, is willing to learn and doesn't mind rolling - I don't care who he is, he can get somewhere in this country."

Lee Linton and Johnny Jones said they worked harder than they did in the South, but they got five times as much for their work. They expressed themselves as believing that many families, whom they knew, would do better than they have, if they could ever get a start.

During the trip, we visited an area where Mr. Jackson thought it possible to buy farms. The land was unimproved, but was adjoining an area which was raw land ten years ago. We also visited a part of the county which would become available, if the Central Valley Authority came through and limited the farms to 160 acres. Mr. Jackson expressed his views on the availability of suitable families to occupy this area. He suggested that we would need to develop farmers who are leasing now, in preparation for FO loans when and if opportunities came. Some system of educating farm laborers in the agriculture of the area, so that they could be graduated to renters, was needed. He definitely thinks that the FSA program can be expanded and become the leading program in the county.



On the evening of June 5th, the following group came together in Fresno and discussed the situation:

Dr. H. C. Wallace

C. D. Saunders, District Superintendent, Golden State Mutual Ins. Co.

T. B. Williams, barber and land owner

Sam Hannibal, business man who lived here for 20 years

J. H. Wilson

These men were of the opinion that there were opportunities in agriculture for Negroes, but raised the question of how we can tell them of these opportunities. Dr. Wallace said he saw no reason why Negroes should not become land owners here like they have everywhere else. He believed that they could learn the job. He cited as proof the many who came to California many years ago with no knowledge of farming except growing cotton, and who now were succeeding as well as the rest of the farmers. He cited Frank Jones and Clinton Tolan in the county and others whom he knew throughout the state. This group requested that I assist them in securing information valuable to the Negro, and in developing a program whereby the information could be put into the hands of leaders for distribution to farmers and prospective farmers.

Mr. Saunders wanted to know why it was there was not a man in that area to work with Negro farm groups as there is in the South. He asked, "How can we get a man to work with us all the time?" He further stated that whatever is done to assist migrants into the field of agriculture should be done within the next two or three years, at the latest, and he felt that the government could afford to put a man in the area. This group definitely felt that much good can be done with some help of this sort.

June 6th, a visit was made to Clinton Tolan, former FSA borrower, who has paid his loan in full. Tolan owns and operates 60 acres of land, is well-equipped, and has a good program on his farm. He says, if it had not been for FSA, he would have lost all he had, and asked why more of the families did not try to get this help. He further stated, that, if the Negro farmers could get FSA to help them, they would soon get on top. I asked him, if he thought this type of farming was too complicated for the Negro, and he replied, "Actually, when you catch on to this work, it is more simple than lots of other jobs. The only thing is that it takes more work." I raised the question of buying and leasing land, and he stated that both were available. The only trouble, he thought, with leasing was that you could pay for a farm twice while you were leasing. In illustrating, he said his neighbor started leasing the same time he started buying 60 acres. Both had 60 acres. Tolan's payment was \$650 a year and his neighbor's was \$500 a year, when they started. Now, his neighbor's rent is up to \$1200 a year, and doubts if he will ever be able to buy. (Incidentally, the neighbor's farm was up for sale in 1944 for \$11,000.) "So," Tolan concluded, "if loans for land purchase could be secured from the government, there was no reason why Negroes could not own good farms."

#### Hanford

June 6th, Mr. Myron C. Frane, FSA Supv. and I visited several points in Kings County looking over the situation. Mr. Frane was not too familiar with the situation as it affected Negroes. However, he believed that Negroes should succeed as well as any other group. Although it is difficult to find farm land, he believed that it could



be found and he certainly would not hesitate, he stated, to make a Negro an FO loan, if he qualified. He said he definitely thinks the program in Kings County can be expanded a great deal. He has apparently done much in this direction since being in the county, and it is my belief that he will continue to work towards this end.

Leaving Mr. Frane, I visited alone Joe Mitchell of Hanford. Mr. Mitchell, who moved from Harris County, Texas about 18 months ago, was a fairly successful farmer and was fairly well equipped when he came to California. He has his place in good shape and is making splendid progress with his farming. His 160 acres were in a splendid state of cultivation, and at the time of my visit he had just completed selling his second cutting of alfalfa for the year. He told me that he had cleared more than \$2000 from his alfalfa to date. He is very enthusiastic about his farming operations; and, although, he had been successful in Texas, he said, this was the country to be in, if you are going to farm.

### Bakersfield

In a conference with Mrs. Marjorie Spring, FSA Supervisor of Kern County, June 7th, doubt was expressed by her that the FSA program could be expanded to any great extent in this county. She stated that this is a county of large operators with large acreages. The principal crops are potatoes, cotton, sugar beets, and yields are very high. However, she did see a tendency on the part of large landholders to sell part of their acreages. She further stated that as soon as prices started to decline, more land would come on the market. She was not anxious to see started a back-to-the-land movement.

Mr. John A. Lott, farm labor placement manager, of Bakersfield, took a very optimistic view of the agricultural situation in the county. He said that even now there is a tendency for some of the large holders to lease some of their holdings. Speaking about the farm labor situation, he said, "There is adequate domestic labor in the county to take care of all harvesting situations; and, I definitely will not approve the importation of any sort of foreign labor as long as we have this supply.. Of course, it has been claimed that the domestic labor could not do the work, but we had to train the Mexican nationals, the POW's, then, why not these people. We trained them to do sugar beet work, and they have done this work so well, it has influenced the increase of acreage from 12,000 acres in 1946 to 23,000 in 1947. A good way never to have family-size farms in this country is to import our labor. Our family-size farms must come from the group who do farm labor; who keep the money at home and save it; and, who will progress from farm laborer to tenant, thence to land owners."

Mr. Lott estimated that there are one-third more Negro farm laborers in Kern County than there were two years ago. The best estimates available show that between 800 and 1,000 Negro families have moved to the country since the war closed. "We believe," he said, "if housing was available, we could absorb 1,000 more families annually for some years to come." I questioned him on the possibility of saturation, which he brushed aside, saying, that he believed even today production is being stepped up faster than our ability to handle labor because of inadequate housing. He also felt, that the personal service establishments would absorb many of these people, and reaffirmed his previous opinion that there would be many of them going into farming. It is the desire of most people in Kern County to permanently establish this migrant group as citizens and use this area as a distribution center for itinerant farm labor. Mr. Lott said, that the county agents and others are work-



ing as fast as they can to establish a system of farming that will produce crops to bridge the low employment period, and give the farm laborer a better distribution of income over the year. To the question of "quality of labor", he said, labor contractors say it is improving rapidly, and the number of people, who could be classified as shiftless, was relatively small, tho noticeable and noisy. Then, he told me that the farm labor contractors had come together and built up a pool of workers to go into another area to pick oranges, replacing Mexican nationals.

G. W. Soloman of Bakersfield, who has been farming for 15 years, was operating an 80 acre farm, had one of the largest hog programs I saw in the area, with 27 sows; was running 27 head of beef cattle on his ranch, and is apparently making money. Mr. Soloman could have acquired the land he operates for \$80 per acre, which today is worth \$350 per acre. He thinks that there will be little interest in land buying by operators and land selling by owners as long as wages and commodity prices remain high.

### Button Willow

Arthur and Robert Williams of Button Willow, who own and operate 100 acres as cotton farmers, started out as farm laborers ten years ago and worked for thirty cents an hour, and now their holdings are worth \$35,000. They say, "Although it is a little tougher now than it was when they started, it is possible for anyone to do what we have done. People are paid more for their labor, now, and should move ahead faster than we did."

Thomas B. Reese, who owns 80 acres and operates an additional 160 acres of alfalfa, is a good example of what can be done. He was a chauffeur most of his life, but is now classified as a big operator. His baling crew, at the time of my visit, was working over-time in keeping up with the crop. Mr. Reese also buys hay and sells to Los Angeles dairymen. He started with \$9,000 five years ago, and his operations for 1945 are expected to gross him \$85,000. Fifty acres of his own 80 acres are rented out to cotton farmers.

M. C. Hall, of Button Willow, owns and operates 135 acres in cotton and alfalfa. He said, "It's quite possible for Negroes to own this whole countryside. They told us it was impossible to buy land from these big operators, but we did. I would say that Negroes own 500 acres in this community and operate an additional 1,000. The time to buy land is when you find it."

In a get-together with the following people of Bakersfield: Rev. H. A. Green, 1128 P. St.; W. T. Hendry, 329 21st St.; Thomas B. Reese; George Clarendon, and Mrs. B. L. Brice, these questions were raised:

1. How many more people can this area support?
2. If there are farming opportunities, how adequate are the sources of information for those who are interested?
3. Is it possible to get someone to work in this area among Negroes out of the FSA local office, on the same basis as FSA works in Texas?

The questions and discussions definitely showed that there are a large group of non-agricultural people who are interested in the future of farm people and are willing to render whatever assistance they can. Mr. Hendry and Rev. Green expressed their



opinion that Negroes have not received information on available opportunities, and they are anxious to do something to correct this situation.

PALO VERDE VALLEY

Blythe

A conference was had with Mr. Van Gorder, retiring FSA Supervisor at Blythe, and Mr. Edward Kelly, newly appointed FSA Supervisor. It was agreed that the best manner in which to get a comprehensive picture of the conditions, as they actually exist, was to see them firsthand. Our visits were made in areas where there was still an available supply of land and where some improvements were being made.

The Sterlings had done all the work on their farm themselves at a cost of about \$120 per acre and todate had brought into cultivation about 150 acres. In this area land in the rough can be bought for about \$50.00.

We drove to the other end of the county to look at other available land, which we were told could be bought in the rough for \$15 to \$20 per acre, and costs around \$125 per acre to put into cultivation. It is the opinion of Mr. Van Gorder that many FO loans can be made in this part of the county.

We also visited the following families:

Willie Bowens, who operates 80 acres of alfalfa and is doing well  
Buster Moore, who operates 40 acres  
Ed Jones, who owns and operates 80 acres  
Thomas Sims, who farms 60 acres  
A. C. Ford, who owns 70 acres, cultivates 40 acres, but is not doing so well  
Lawrence Martin, who owns 80 acres, which is nearly paid for

Bowens says that anybody who is willing to work and take advice can come in and soon own a home; that is, if he can get financial aid. Bowens is an FSA borrower.

Ed Jones said a fellow will have a hard time, now, unless he can get better credit than is available to most families.

In a swing around the county, after I had left the supervisors, I visited Bruce Collins, who operates 200 acres; Mrs. R. E. Petty, who owns and operates 80 acres; Charles Glen, who owns and operates 95 acres. During my visits, I picked up the names of 55 Negro families who own or operate more than 40 acres each family. All those with whom I talked felt there was opportunity here for many more Negroes. It is my opinion that this valley, tho small, offers a very good opportunity for land ownership expansion. There are more Negroes participating in the FSA program in this valley than I found elsewhere. The townspeople know about it, and appear hopeful that FSA will assist many more Negroes to own farms.

While in the office, a Mr. K. K. Skousen of Chandler, Arizona, came in and offered to sell two tracts of land in East Riverside County. I secured the following list of offerings from the Blythe office:



LAND FOR SALE IN BLYTHE, CALIFORNIA (EAST RIVERSIDE COUNTY)

<u>Owner</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Price Asked</u>
K. K. Skousen	Chandler, Ariz.	NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 15, Township 7, Range 23 E - 160 acres	\$25,000
" " "	" "	S $\frac{1}{2}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 20, Township 7, Range 23, 80 acres	8,000
James G. Clark	2116 4th Ave. Los Angeles, 16	SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 8, Township 7, Range 22E, 163 acres	8,000
Ruth M. Johnson	C/o Mrs. Clyde Miles Box 55, Ripley	40 acres (18 acres in culti- vation, balance bulldozed & ready to level - land is all fenced, located 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Ripley - adjoins Horace M. Miller's land - sandy type loam)	3,000
R. T. Prather	Box 611, Blythe	80 acres - (lives 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Ripley)	?
A. C. Ford	Box 167, Blythe	17 acres - located near Tom Sims ranch - 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles on S. Broadway	1,000
C. D. Saxton	1811 Bush St., Santa Ana, Calif.	40 acres - NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 26, Township 6, Range 22 (will rent or sell - no improvements - all leveled and finished)	4,000
J. R. Haslam	Box 646, Blythe	160 acres (40 acres in cultiva- tion, 150 can be put into cul- tivation - located 8 miles SW of Ripley)	6,000
Andrew Lofton	Rt. 1, Box 259 Blythe, Calif.	40 acres - fenced and cross- fenced - tent house, electricity may be available - seller lives south of Bill Evje place - land is across from Talley's Gip Joint	2,500
Alonzo McDonald	Star Route	20 acres - good basement - 3 miles SW of Ripley - 10 acres on west side could be bought	3,500
Harvey A. Carroll	Box 521, Blythe	has two 80 acre tracts for sale	?
Grady Hardcastle*	Rt. 1, Box 248	81 acre tract - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , Sec. 6, Township 6, Range 22 (lives on old Frank Gettis place) all but 5 or 6 acres leveled.	8,000



\*NOTE: Owner has tractor and equipment and other machinery, plus a four-wheel trailer, also household furniture and equipment including refrigerator, gas range. This would also be available, if owner sells his farm.

### IMPERIAL VALLEY

#### El Centro

On June 12th, at El Centro, in a conference with Mr. Mr. Leonard D. Webster, FSA Supervisor, plans were outlined for work in the county. Since he was busy for the balance of the day, I interviewed the following people alone:

Mr. George Wainwright, Farm Adviser  
Mr. George Garriegus, Farm Labor Office  
Professor W. A. Payne, Principal of the Negro High School  
Mr. R. Pete Ostrander, Veterans Service Officer

Mr. Wainwright thought there were still many opportunities in Imperial Valley and, that, actually the surface had not been scratched. He said the Bard District is perhaps the best area in which to buy farms at the present. He expressed concern because so few Negroes came into his office for assistance. He suggested that I talk with Professor Payne and see if we could arrange a system whereby Negroes would at least know where to go for information.

Mr. George Garriegus expressed himself as being quite pleased at the labor adjustment. He stated that the domestic workers were improving at a very rapid rate, and at this time, were in sufficient numbers to carry on the work. When I asked him about mixed crews, he said there were always one or two who will try to start something, however, if you let them know this is the way it will be, at the start, you'll have no trouble. He thinks his labor supply is becoming more and more efficient, and that Negroes are returning to the fields more and more each day.

Mr. Ostrander says that in the matter of getting veterans into agriculture, housing is definitely the bottleneck, and that too much progress cannot be made at this time. He doubted that veterans were buying many small, high-priced tracts of land. He discussed with me the probability of the opening up for veterans the East Mesa by the Reclamation Service; and, he is hopeful that this work will get under way before the end of the year. This will bring into service about 250,000 acres with a minimum of 80 acre tracts and a maximum of 160 acre tracts.

Professor W. A. Payne and I discussed possible ways of disseminating information to Negroes in the area. He thought that, if they had someone to work with their Better Citizens League, it could be of untold value in distributing information. He further stated that the Negro population of the Valley had increased by one-third in the past two years, and that the new children coming into the community presented quite a problem, because they were an average of two grades behind in their school work, and it took a lot of skillful work to bring them up. He thinks these children are basically smarter than those of the '34 and '36 migrants. He expressed himself as recognizing two major things the Negro needs: more information, and more assistance in building homes. He raised the question of government assistance in part-time farming.



June 13th, Mr. Webster and I made a trip through the area and discussed the problems of farm labor, tenure and what means could be employed in absorbing more families into the area. It was his opinion that infiltration was well under way and, although the supply of labor seemed to be adequate, more domestic workers were in evidence than in previous years. As far as he was able to determine, their work was satisfactory. The harvest was on schedule. He said that good land for family-size operation is becoming more difficult to secure, however, he was making a few FO loans.

We visited the farm recently bought by Custer Collins, which appeared to be a very good 80 acre tract in an area where good land is scarce. Collins had just completed baling his alfalfa crop, and he and his father were building his house. Collins has had two years of college work and, from the start he has made, he should be a credit to FSA. He said that he was prepared to make a \$1,000 payment on his farm, and would be in the office the last of the week; thinks that he can pay \$2,000 each year on the farm, as long as crops are normal and prices stay near where they are now.

We also had a brief talk with Ulysses Toland, who manages a 600 acre farm near Imperial. Toland said the opportunities for Negroes in the Valley are not as good now as they were a few years ago, when the valley had more cotton cultivation. It takes a little smarter fellow to get going here now. And, he further stated, he did not think there was any particular resistance towards Negroes who came into the Valley and "proved they wanted more than a few dollars for a spree." He said there were several more Negroes beside himself, in the Valley, who were managing large ranches.

It would appear that there are agricultural opportunities in this area, but, there is definitely much land that would not prove out, and it will take skilled technicians' approval to prevent some serious errors.

#### LOS ANGELES

June 9th, a conference was had with Mr. S. T. Toney, who was for fifteen years Negro county agent for Guadalupe County, Texas, and now is the only Negro agriculture teacher in the State of California. Also, participating in this conference was Dr. Harold M. Kingsley, head resident of Pilgrim House, a community house in the area of the city called "Little Tokio" - now a Negro community. Dr. Kingsley is the recognized leader and authority on social needs of the Negroes in the Los Angeles area. We spent some time analyzing the situation, after I explained the purpose of my study. Mr. Toney has made a rather exhaustive study of this population shift, and other mass migrations of Negroes in the past. He said, this is the most favorable migration in which Negroes ever participated. They have, here in California, the perfect weather, and unlike during other movements of this kind, they have agriculture to fall back on, at the end of the industrial heyday. In other migrations, they had neither favorable weather, nor favorable agricultural opportunities. The negro lives here where only Japanese formerly lived, and they are rapidly taking over the work of domestic services, formerly monopolized by the Japanese, and, I think, this is only the beginning.

Dr. Kingsley was highly elated over the information I gave him about the Negro moving into the agricultural picture, especially in the San Joaquin Valley. He said that the surplus labor from war industries is being absorbed in the Los



Angeles area at a much faster rate than anyone dreamed was possible. "We anticipated that by this time we would have had a very serious situation in the city. "But," he added, "I believe that conditions have improved instead. I don't think the problem is solved, however; we have still a very acute housing shortage." He suggested that we get a small group of leaders together and discuss the situation and see if we could work out some plan of community cooperation. The meeting was arranged for Friday night, June 14th.

On June 10, I had a conference with Mr. Clyde C. Christenson, State Director, and discussed the purpose of the study, giving him the information I had secured in the urban centers I had visited, and together we mapped the itinerary for the balance of the study, deciding to include the Palo Verde and Imperial Valley areas. At the conclusion of the conference, I left for Blythe, an area that Mr. Christenson thought had possibilities.

Los Angeles is certainly an overcrowded city, but in talking with many of the lesser people, they conveyed the impression to me that they could not see the situation as hopeless. On the contrary, their viewpoint was very optimistic. They actually believe that most of the people who want a job can get better wages than they did at home.

June 14th, in an informal get-together arranged by the Rev. Harold M. Kingsley, head resident of Pilgrim House, which was attended by Rev. Kingsley, Walter Lear Gordon, attorney-at-law, Dr. J. A. Somerville, prominent physician, D. DeWitt Turpean, minister of Hamilton Methodist Church, we discussed the problem. These men were selected by Rev. Kingsley to serve as a central committee to work out ways and means on how to pass on to interested persons vital information of an agriculture nature. Dr. Kingsley cautioned us about too widely advertising what we might term benefits. He said there were some people who certainly would attempt to exploit the situation for their own benefit, if we were not careful. I reviewed with them my findings to date, and we discussed how we could best disseminate information. Dr. Somerville raised the question of FSA appointing a field representative, and asked what I thought the possibility was for doing so. I told him it might be possible, and the discussion drifted into what the group could do to bring this about.

Rev. Turpean expressed his belief that whatever is done should be done as quickly as possible, as the next two years would be the critical period. Dr. Kingsley and Mr. Gordon agreed that Los Angeles had absorbed more people than they had thought possible. The situation had been eased, but was still critical. We adjourned after Dr. Kingsley agreed to use his office as the temporary center for distributing information. Each of the group agreed to select three or four people to assist in disseminating information that came to them. It is my intention to keep in contact with this and other groups I have worked with.

#### SAN FRANCISCO

Individual conferences were had with Dr. Matt Crawford, CIO Organizer; Mr. Tom Flemings, managing editor of the San Francisco Recorder; Mr. F. J. Robinson, who was for 13 years Negro County Agricultural Agent of Anderson County, Texas.

Dr. Crawford said, "This is the greatest country that the American Negro has ever explored, and although conditions are in a state of flux now, I still believe it offers him his greatest opportunity. I believe that for the most part, the Negro will replace the Jap, and infiltrate onto the farms, the same as they have done in the South. I do not think the colonization idea is at all feasible, because in



this area, he will receive very little of the type of training fostered in the South - he will be on his own for the most part."

Mr. Flemings said, "The Negro must make his bid in agriculture now." In his opinion, he has about three years to do so. He will need help, as big farming interest would prefer the use of Mexican nationals and other foreign labor. They have been able to regiment their lives, and they do not believe they can do this with Negroes who have a different idea of citizenship, as compared with that of foreigners.

Mr. Robinson, who has been in San Francisco for three years, has traveled over much of the state, and has a fairly good working knowledge of both the rural and urban conditions. He said he had talked with many Negro farmers, and he was surprised to know how quickly they are learning the farming methods of the area. More Negro farm laborers are saving their money to make further investments in agriculture than he had anticipated. "They are going to have a more difficult time getting started here than they would have in the South," he said, "as the share-cropper system, where they learned the 'knowhow' and made a 'stake' is not used here." "Also," he added, "it is more difficult to save the large amounts of money needed here for rent and equipment. However, with some guidance and financial help, I see no reason why he shouldn't do much better here than he has done elsewhere."

On the urban situation, Mr. Robinson admitted that the situation was more complex in San Francisco than in Los Angeles, and he gave these reasons, (1) there was developed during the war years a tremendous amount of industry in the Bay area, (2) the agricultural situation is as congested as industry in the area, (3) the reduction of industry is still going on. On the other hand, he said, he thinks any man who wants to work can find a job now. In fact, he said, he was holding two jobs, and they were short on help at one of these places. It's like this, he said, the smart ones hold two jobs, and the not-so-smart ones are on unemployment compensation. "And, too," he said, "I believe that industry will reconvert and use many more people than they are now using. If housing were available, it would surprise you how many families, now in the Bay area would move their families to rural areas where many of them are now working. I think housing here is the bottleneck of the whole situation."

I conferred with Mr. Robinson, Mr. Flemings and Mr. Joe James, president of the NAACP, San Francisco. We reviewed what information was available on the population congestion and discussed possible assistance to be had. The fact was brought out that the Navy yard would lay off about 3,000 Negroes July 1st. This, and other problems already developed, was discussed. The group concluded that:

1. Studies should be made of the available information.
2. Methods of getting the information to the people be worked out.
3. Plans for educating them gradually to their new environment be formulated.

It was agreed by the group that they would develop an organization which would assist in disseminating information, and asked that I do what I could towards getting one of the government agencies to employ a man to assist in bringing information of agricultural opportunities to the people.

Mr. Ed Banfield, information specialist, Farm Security Administration, and I visited with Mr. Lawrence I. Hewes, former FSA Regional Director, and now director of



the California Council for Civic Unity, an organization designed to improve race relations. We discussed the opportunities for the rural minded Negro, but Mr. Hewes held a negative viewpoint on the subject. He thought the large scale operators had such a tremendous hold and influence on agriculture, that he doubted if we would be able to dent the surface, unless legislation was enacted to bring about the breaking up of the large acreage held by big farm interests. All of this would seem to indicate that he does not think agriculture offers much of an outlet. His hope is that reconversion of industry will absorb the surplus labor. The matter of using the organization which he represents as a means of disseminating information to the groups that needed it, was brought up, and he was willing to have us use the organization in any way we thought it would be helpful, but cautioned us that it was a volunteer organization and the effectiveness of any assistance would depend largely on the personality of the person acting as go-between. Mr. Hewes thought that a field representative could be very valuable.

### Summary

The development of this report is based altogether on opinions and quotations secured in interviews and conferences participated in, and summarization is as follows:

1. There is no indication that the present Negro population plans to leave California.
2. The labor needs at this time about equal the supply.
3. The quality of farm labor is improving; needs training to hasten adjustment.
4. Many are moving into agriculture, mostly as farm laborers.
5. Need for farm labor will increase in most areas.
6. Lack of housing in the rural areas is impeding the movement to these areas.
7. Negroes as a whole have little or no information concerning agricultural assistance available.
8. Negroes are succeeding in most cases where they have an opportunity to farm.
9. Negroes who have succeeded do not think it impossible for other Negroes to succeed, even now.
10. Good land is not plentiful. There is some good land available in the majority of the communities.
11. Negroes in the area do have a desire to farm.
12. They need more direct information about government opportunities in agriculture.
13. Big land holding companies, and some individuals, tend to discourage the family-size farm idea.
14. Negroes in Los Angeles are being absorbed to some extent. They are over-



crowded, but have a house to live in, something they do not have in the smaller towns. Some of their living conditions in small towns are deplorable at present because of housing shortages in the rural areas. They are moving into domestic service rapidly.

15. The situation in San Francisco remains indefinite because of the reduction in industry. It is estimated that 3,000 Negroes will be laid off in the next thirty days. This area is cramped, but there is greater possibility of this area absorbing its labor surplus through reconversion than was thought a few months ago.

Recommendations:

1. That FSA more thoroughly explore the possibilities of program expansion during this period of population flux. Many more people have a chance to get well established before the levelling out process develops. I think we can dig deeper.
2. That serious thought be given to rendering assistance to families who are in a favorable position to do part-time farming.
3. That a representative be placed in the field to assist in coordinating the efforts of FSA and civic organizations in getting distributive educational material to farm families, and to act as liaison between the civic groups and government agencies designed to help the low-income group of farmers. This person should be on the FSA staff.

If such a man was put into active field service, he could assist in draining much of the surplus labor dammed up in the industrial areas to rural areas. He would be able to draw into the FSA program many of the families already in the rural areas, who have made a start and who are urgently in need of the assistance FSA offers. There are probably 800 or 1,000 families in the area who may need help.

Respectfully yours,

John H. Williams,  
Senior Administrative Assistant



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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Francisco - May 31 - The Farm Security Administration today began a special study of the situation of Negroes who migrated to California cities during the war and who now wish to resume farming in this state or elsewhere.

Ralph W. Hollenberg, FSA regional director, said that John H. Williams, a Negro agricultural specialist of Dallas, Texas, has been assigned to study the farm-minded Negro's problem here during the next three weeks.

Williams will visit FSA offices at Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield next week. The remainder of his time will be spent in Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

"Many Negroes who came to California during the war were farm-experienced," Hollenberg said. "Some of them want to buy or rent farms here now. They are finding few good opportunities because of the prevailing inflation of land values and because they lack credit and in many cases the necessary specialized skills. A good many Negro families are being sold plots of sub-marginal land on which they can never hope to make a decent living.

"We want to learn more of the needs and plans of the farm-minded Negroes who are now in the cities, and we want to help them open every safe channel to farm ownership. At the same time we want to discourage the purchase of uneconomic tracts the chief crop of which will be chronic poverty."

Williams will give special attention to the problems of Negro veterans who want to buy or rent California farms.



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